

**STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD
BOARD MEETING SESSION – DIVISION OF WATER QUALITY
MARCH 20, 2018**

ITEM 7

SUBJECT

EVALUATION OF GENERAL WASTE DISCHARGE REQUIREMENTS FOR COMPOSTING OPERATIONS

DISCUSSION

On August 4, 2015, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) adopted General Waste Discharge Requirements for Composting Operations, [Order WQ 2015-0121-DWQ](#) (Composting General Order). The Composting General Order has requirements for composting operations to manage wastewater, and includes specifications for setbacks from surface water, depth to groundwater, allowable feedstocks, drainage, working surfaces, and detention ponds.

At the September 19, 2017 Board meeting, staff presented an informational item on the Implementation of the Composting General Order, providing information about performance measures, enrollment, and compliance. At that meeting, stakeholders expressed concerns regarding limitations of the agricultural exemption for on-farm composting and requirements for composting manure. Additionally, stakeholders suggested that dairies should compost manure as a best management practice. However, there appear to be more stringent requirements for manure in the Composting General Order than in the Central Valley Water Board's Dairy General Order. Stakeholders indicated that this serves as a disincentive to compost. Because dairies that are enrolled in a regional board order already have requirements for manure handling areas, there is confusion between the two sets of requirements. To address these concerns, the State Water Board directed staff to investigate these issues and evaluate if the current requirements are appropriate.

Water Board staff coordinated meetings with stakeholders and developed options for further consideration. The current agricultural exemption limits feedstocks to those generated on site, only giving away or selling no more than 1,000 cubic yards per year. On-farm composting representatives proposed allowing the import of an unlimited amount of off-site material in order to supplement material composted on site, applying the finished compost to their own land. If the agricultural exemption was modified as proposed by the on-farm composters, manure from confined animal facilities could be taken to farms for composting. Alternatively, woody material from orchards could be transported to dairies for composting and applied on feed crop land. If eligible for the agricultural exemption, this would remove any monetary disincentives to compost.

Representatives of the dairies indicated that in order to provide an incentive to compost, removing the 1,000 cubic yard restriction on selling or giving away compost to qualify for the agricultural exemption should be lifted. One option is to remove this restriction completely, but this option would conflict with maintaining a level playing field with the commercial composters. Another alternative is to change the limit for selling or giving away compost to 5,000 cubic yards. Under this scenario, a farmer could sell or give away the same volume already

established in the Composting General Order for small volume composters, but could generate an unlimited volume for application to the farmer's fields.

A separate but related issue focused around volume restrictions for additives. The Composting General Order includes 10 percent (%) and 30% restrictions for additives – anything over those percentages are considered feedstocks, depending on the tier. The limits were based on potential threat to water quality by additive materials, and design specifications for protection of water quality. If the definition of feedstock was revised to increase the percentage, composters could include a larger volume of materials, including manure, under Tier I.

POLICY ISSUE

None.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

REGIONAL BOARD IMPACT

None. This is an informational item.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to work with stakeholders to propose any necessary changes to the Composting General Order related to manure management, including an evaluation of the definitions of agricultural material and agricultural composting, and the percentages of additives allowed for each tier.